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The literature in organizational climate research lacks information regarding the empirical use of the concept of authenticity. This is primarily due to the lack of an appropriate operational definition for the variable, even though it has received much interdisciplinary interest. One possible means of clarifying the authenticity concept to make it empirically operational is to link it to role theory, especially to the concept of role distance. From this perspective, authenticity may be conceptualized as some point on the role distance continuum ranging from behavior perceived as expressing complete embracement of a particular role through behavior perceived as expressing complete alienation from a particular role. This conceptualization of authenticity does have support from the literature. If role distance can be accepted as defining one possible dimension of authenticity, then two means of operationalizing this aspect of authenticity are suggested: (1) Measure the frequencies of behavioral slips in a situated role in situated activity systems, and (2) determine the amount of time an actor is perceived as behaving "out of role" as compared to "in role" in a situated activity system. (HW)

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AUTHENTICITY, ROLE DISTANCE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE: TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION+

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The organizational climates research by Halpin and Croft[1] has produced an array of potentially fruitful concepts for organizational analysis. Among these is the concept of authenticity, a factor so-named which appeared to emerge from a Q analysis of their climates typology data. Use of this high-order intervening variable was invoked by Halpin and Croft because it seemed to help explain much of the variability within and among their subtests and climates findings. As Halpin has recently reported,

> When we started (our research), the word 'authenticity' was not part of our professional vocabulary. But the more we worked with the Climate data, ...the more that we sought for explanations to account for the differences that we found, the more, too, did we find ourselves forced to contend with the concept of authenticity.[2]

Unfortunately, while appearing to possess conceptual promise for organizational research, subsequent empirical use of the authenticity concept has been precluded, in part, by lack of an appropriate operational definition for the variable. Although Halpin and Croft (and others) have proposed a number of approaches to the problem,[3] none of these have been particularly exploited to date by organizational researchers. Undoubtedly, much of the apparent reluctance of researchers to tackle the task derives from the ambiguity and behavioral elusiveness of the prose definitions of the concept in the literature. As Halpin himself confesses,

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> ...we were not always sure that we knew what we meant by the term (authenticity). Indeed, even now we are not sure. Yet we found that the authenticity concept, fuzzy as it was, did give us a useful purchase on our findings.[4]

From one standpoint, the authenticity concept has been exceedingly fertile. Its use has inspired much interest from such fields as philosophy,[5] religion,[6] psychology and psychiatry (especially psychotherapy),[7] sensitivity training,[8] and, most recently, sociology.[9] Yet the very richness of its varied conceptual connotations has served to render it relatively impotent for the purposes of the empiricist. Many of its referents are distinctly metaphysical or even mystical in character, thus placing it behaviorally beyond reach of the researcher.

This paper explores <u>one</u> possible means of clarifying the authenticity concept and suggests an approach toward its eventual empirical operationalization. As has been stated previously, review of the vast and varied literature dealing with the concept is sufficient to convince one of its great complexity. Authenticity as a construct[10] is, at very least, likely to be multidimensional. To propose one approach to its clarification and operationalization is merely to scratch the surface of the problem. Many such attempts will need to be undertaken if authenticity as a construct is eventually to be of use to the researcher and theoretician. Therefore, this paper should be considered as merely a preliminary effort at delineating <u>one</u> facet or dimension of authenticity.

Sharing Biddle and Thomas' conviction that role theory concepts perhaps presently come closer to being the universal language of the behavioral sciences than any other vocabulary,[11] this writer proposes the possibility of linking Goffman's concept of role distance to Halpin and Croft's concept of authenticity in an effort to provide greater clarity to the latter and in order to suggest a possible means of facilitating its empirical operationalization.

Distinct similarities can be noted in the authors' prose definitions of role distance and authenticity, if one refers to the literature. For example, Goffman defines role distance variously as: "expressive denial of the virtual self that is implied in a role;[12] 'effectively' expressed pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role;[13] the margin of reservation the individual has placed between himself and his situated role;[14] those behaviors that are perceived by present others as suggestive of an actor's disaffection, and resistance against, a role;[15] or, actions effectively conveying some detachment of the performer from a role he is performing."[16] Halpin and Croft, on the other hand, have defined authenticity variously as: "professional roles remaining secondary to what the individual, himself, is as a human being;[17] bringing one's own individual style to a role enactment;[18] or, conversely, inauthenticity as being the use of one's role as a protective cloak to hide lack of personal identity;[19] or, performance of a role with an attendant denial of self."[20] Other similar consistencies can be observed in the prose definitions of role distance and authenticity as proposed by these respective authors.

Assuming, then, some communality of referent between the concepts of role distance and authenticity at the level of prose definition, it is thought that employment of Goffman's role distance concept for that of Halpin and Croft's authenticity presents a more unified conceptual approach to the problem of analyzing this particular aspect of human behavior. It circumvents, in the process, the complications of the concept of self implicit in use of the authenticity term. This is not to suggest that role distance is the absolute equivalent of authenticity. (It should be noted at this point that the author is well aware of the potential pitfalls posed by attempting to equate concepts derived from distinctive nomological networks.)

It is, however, to point to the possibility of role distance as constituting one dimension of authenticity.

Goffman has cited some of the advantages of the role distance concept.

> This conduct (role distance) is something that falls between role obligations on one hand and actual role performance on the other. This gap has always caused trouble for sociologists. Often they try to ignore it. Faced with it, they sometimes despair and turn from their own direction of analysis; they look to the biography of the performer and try to find in his history some particularistic explanation of events, or they rely on psychology, alluding to the fact that in addition to playing the formal themes of his role, the individual always behaves personally and spontaneously, phrasing the standard (role) obligations in a way that has a special psychological fit for him.
> The concept of role distance provides a sociological means of dealing with one type of divergence between (role) obligation and actual (role) performance.[21]

And as Goffman further concludes,

> There is a vulgar tendency in social thought to divide the conduct of the individual into a profane and sacred part. ...The profane part is attributed to the obligatory world of social roles; it is formal, stiff, and dead; it is exacted by society. The sacred part has to do with 'personal' matters and 'personal' relationships --- with what an individual is 'really' like underneath it all when he relaxes and breaks through to those in his presence.
> ...The concept of role distance helps to combat this touching tendency to keep a part of the world safe from sociology. For if an individual is to show that he is a 'nice guy' or, by contrast, one much less nice than a human being need be, then it is through his using or not using role distance that this is likely to be done. It is right here, in manifestations of role distance, that the individual's personal style is to be found. And it is argued ... that role distance is almost as much subject to role analysis as are the core tasks of roles themselves.[22]

In terms of role distance, then, it is thought that authenticity may productively be viewed as a kind of "derived concept."[23] From this perspective, authenticity may be conceptualized as some point on the role distance continuum ranging from behavior perceived as expressing complete embracement[24] of a particular role through behavior

perceived as expressing complete alienation from a particular role. (See Figure 1.)

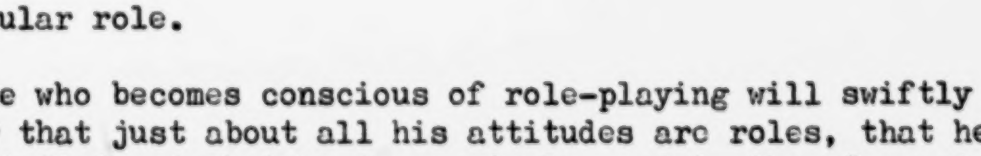

Fig. 1. Conceptualization of authenticity as being some point "X" on the role distance continuum ranging from behavior perceived as expressing complete role embracement through behavior perceived as expressing complete role alienation.

Some support for this manner of conceptualizing authenticity can be enlisted from a quotation by Alan Watts in which inauthentic role playing is characterized as being a lack of spontaneity in the playing out of a role; or, authentic role playing as being an instance in which many different roles are invoked in the playing out of a particular role.

> Anyone who becomes conscious of role-playing will swiftly discover that just about all his attitudes are roles, that he cannot find out what he is genuinely, and is therefore at a loss (about) what to do to express himself sincerely. Thereupon he is self-conscious and blocked in his relationship, finding himself in the double-bind predicament where every road is closed. This leaves him in a state of complete paralysis if he persists in thinking that there is some 'right' course of action and some particular set of feelings which constitute his real self. Where he expected to find the specific truth about himself he found freedom, but mistook it for mere nothingness. For human freedom does indeed comprise an order, yet ... it cannot be classified; it cannot be identified with any particular role. Therefore at this point of the double bind he must wait, and see what happens of itself, spontaneously. He will find that the sensation that every road is barred abruptly switches into the sensation that every road is open. He can play all roles, just as in Hindu mythology the true self is pictured as the godhead acting all the parts of the multitude of finite creatures.[25]

If role distance can be tentatively accepted as defining one possible dimension of authenticity, then several observational means of operationalizing this aspect

of authenticity are immediately suggested. First, in situated activity systems ("face-to-face interaction with others for the performance of a single joint activity"[26]), a more count of the frequencies of behavioral slips from enactment of a particular situated role which a given role performer is perceived as making might provide one fairly simple index of this facet of authenticity. A second, slightly more elaborate and controlled, index might entail determining a proportion wherein the amount of time a given actor is perceived as behaving "out of role" in a situated activity system is compared to the amount of time that given actor is perceived as behaving "in role."

Although the situated activity system comprises an integral part of Goffman's role-distance conceptual scheme, it is possible to conceive of role distance outside such a system as well. In other words, role distance behavior perhaps can more readily be observed within the confining context of specific situated activity systems, but it can also be picked up impressionistically beyond the confines of such immediate interactional systems. In this case it may be possible to assess <u>generalized impressions</u> of role distance. For example, perhaps Schutz's FIRO-B Scale[27] could be administered to a random selection of, say, half the teachers in a fairly large school. (FIRO-B purports to measure the degree of expressed or wanted inclusion, control, and affection needs possessed by a subject. These three psychological need dimensions, it is proposed, are most crucial in establishing interpersonal relationships.) Each of these randomly selected teachers would be asked to respond to FIRO-B in such a way as to reflect his individual expectation held for the principal role. These FIRO-B expectations would then be combined and averaged to represent a composite role expectation. The remaining teachers would be asked to respond to FIRO-B in such a way as to describe how they perceived their principal in actual performance of his role. These FIRO-B role descriptions would

then be combined and averaged to represent a composite of the principal's perceived role behavior. The difference (or distance) between these composite means could then be assessed. This difference would be an index of the group's generalized impression of their principal's role distance.

Other operational approaches to role distance can readily be imagined because of the behavioral vulnerability of the concept. While such operational exercises are requisite for making empirical inroads on role distance, they are not sufficient for probing the basic proposition advanced by this paper. That proposition was, namely, that role distance constitutes one dimension of authenticity. If this proposition is to be supported, positive empirical relationships will have to be evidenced between the various role distance measures cited above and Halpin and Croft's OCDQ measure of Esprit and Thrust;[28] also, between the role distance measures and Open Climate.[29] It is in this manner that the construct of authenticity will have to be patiently fashioned.

Having noted, then, some basic similarities at the level of prose definition between Goffman's concept of role distance and Halpin and Croft's concept of authenticity and having observed that, for purposes of operational definition, the behavioral vulnerabilities of role distance appear to be appreciably greater than do those of the authenticity concept, this paper has proposed that researchers may well be able to make empirical inroads upon the more ambiguous concept of authenticity by treating role distance as one of its dimensions.

While the reductionist attempts of this paper in attempting to bring the authenticity concept into the realm of that which can be empirically assessed may displease some of its exponents, this is precisely the task which needs to be done if the concept is to have eventual utility for the organizational researcher and theoretician.

Halpin has indicated the need for a direct measure of authenticity.[30] As an intervening variable the concept appeared to have impressive explanatory power in helping to interpret the organizational climates findings. If the concept really possesses such potential for organizational analysis, researchers should focus their efforts toward its eventual empirical definition. As Halpin has warned, this will be no easy task, for authenticity is a tricky concept.[31]

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